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The PIT and the PENDULUM

By Edgar Allan Poe

Illustrated by August M. Froehlich

This is a story of the time of the Spanish Inquisition, a black, bloody page in history, when murder, terror and treachery ran rampant in the streets....

WITH OTHER CONVICTED MEN, THE PRISONER IS DRIVEN THROUGH THE STREETS.

Death to the heretics!

Death to them all!

TO THE INQUISITION COURT...

The defendant is accused of treason against the state...

AFTER THE TESTIMONY HAS BEEN GIVEN...

The prisoner has been sentenced to death. Return him to Toledo Prison.

He must be important to be reserved for the dungeon!

WEAKNESS OVERCOMES THE PRISONER...

Disgracing the court by fainting!

AS CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNS, THE PRISONER OPENED HIS EYES TO DISCOVER....

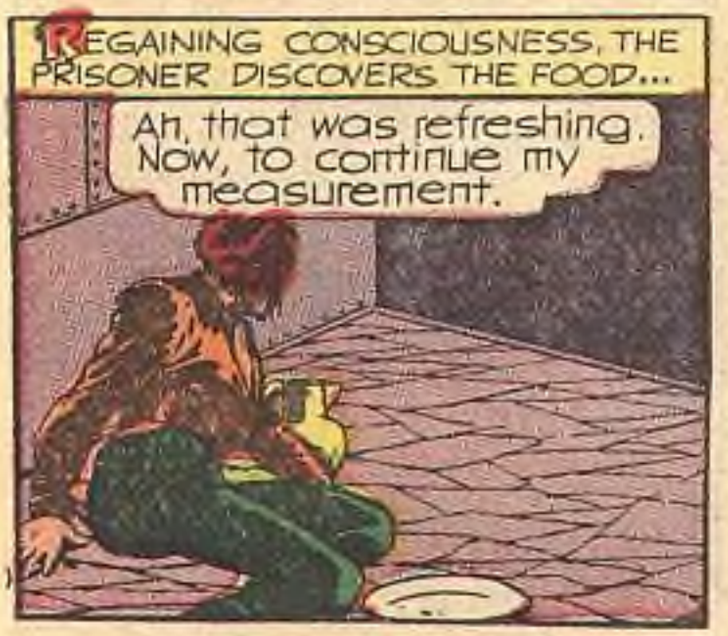
I'm in total darkness and the place smells damp! They've buried me alive! Why haven't they killed me with the others?

FEAR DRIVES THE SICK MAN TO ACTION .....
It's too large for a tomb. But how large is it, then? Here is a wall and I'll measure the distance.

TEARING OFF A PIECE OF THE ROBE'S HEM...
I'll count the paces as I walk, until I return to touch the rag.
Oh, I feel dizzy again.

Quickly, he's coming to!

THE PRISONER FAINTS. ONE OF THE CELL WALLS LIFTS...
Give him the food, now.


REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS, THE PRISONER DISCOVERS THE FOOD...
Ah, that was refreshing. Now, to continue my measurement.

Here's the rag. I've counted one hundred paces. Now, to measure across the floor.

AS HE WALKS IN THE DARKNESS, HIS FOOT CATCHES ON THE TORN HEM OF HIS ROBE...

THE PRISONER PARTIALLY FALLS INTO THE PIT...
Had I taken one step more before I tripped, I would have fallen clear into this pit!

A SICKENING STENCH OF DECAY ARISES FROM THE PIT AND THE CONDEMNED MAN RECOILS IN HORROR. THEN, BREAKING OFF A JAGGED PIECE OF STONE, HE DROPS IT INTO THE BLACK ABYSS BELOW...
The stone had sped downwards for twenty seconds before it hit water.

THE PRISONER CRAWLS ON HANDS AND KNEES TOWARDS THE WALL...
Ah, I see their fiendish plan. They want me to plunge into it. That's why they didn't kill me!

No matter what tortures they devise, and what agonies I must endure, I shall never throw myself into that pit.

FEAR KEEPS THE PRISONER AWAKE MANY HOURS, BUT EVENTUALLY, SLEEP OVER-TAKES HIM...
Why don't they just throw him into the pit?
They want him to descend into purgatory himself. If this plan fails, they have other tortures prepared.

Ah, he's stirring!
Good! Soon, he'll awake and drink the drugged water.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, HE AWAKES AND FEELS THE PITCHER OF WATER...

THE DRUG SOON TAKES EFFECT...

A little to the right. His heart must be placed directly in the thing's path.

WITH THE WALL IN PLACE, THE GUARDS NOW PUT BURNING SULPHUR STICKS INTO A NARROW SLIT RUNNING ACROSS THE BASE ON THE WALL...
Your jobs are to see that his cell is now always light.

LATER, THE PRISONER AWAKES TO FIND HIMSELF TIED AND THE CELL LIT UP....
The cell is smaller and higher than I imagined. What are those queer paintings on the walls?

And what is that painting on the ceiling?

Father Time. And instead of a scythe, he holds a pendulum.

AS THE CONDEMNED MAN WATCHES, THE PENDULUM IS LOWERED A YARD FROM THE CEILING, AND IT BEGINS TO SWING IN AN ARC...

THE FRANTIC PRISONER TURNS AWAY, EXTENDING HIS FREE ARM TO REACH FOR THE BOWL OF FOOD...

So, since I accidentally avoided their pit, my tormentors have made a new form of torture for me.

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW, THE PENDULUM, WITH ITS CRESCENT OF DEATH, DESCENDS LOWER AND LOWER...
Ah, the hot angry hiss of the swinging pendulum grows ever closer!

THE RATS HAVE BECOME BOLDER...
Oow! I've been bitten!

WHILE AT NIGHT, THE GUARDS LEAVE JUST ENOUGH FOOD TO KEEP THE POOR WRETCH ALIVE...
No water tonight. We left him water two nights ago.

SLOWLY THE RAZOR SHARP CRESCENT DESCENDS UNTIL QUITE NEAR TO THE VICTIM'S BODY...
The swinging pendulum is driving me mad! I must get out of its path.

THE PRISONER STRUGGLES TO BREAK HIS BONDS, TO MOVE OUT OF THE PENDULUM'S PATH...

REALIZING IT IS A HOPELESS TASK, THE PRISONER RELAXES...
Come, Death, I welcome you.

THE DOOMED MAN'S HAND ACCIDENTALLY STRIKES THE FOOD BOWL...

A PLAN OF HOPE FLASHES THROUGH THE PRISONER'S BRAIN...

THE PRISONER RUBS THE PIECE OF MEAT ON THE THONGS THAT BIND HIM...

THE HUNGRY RATS FOLLOW THE SCENT OF FOOD AND...

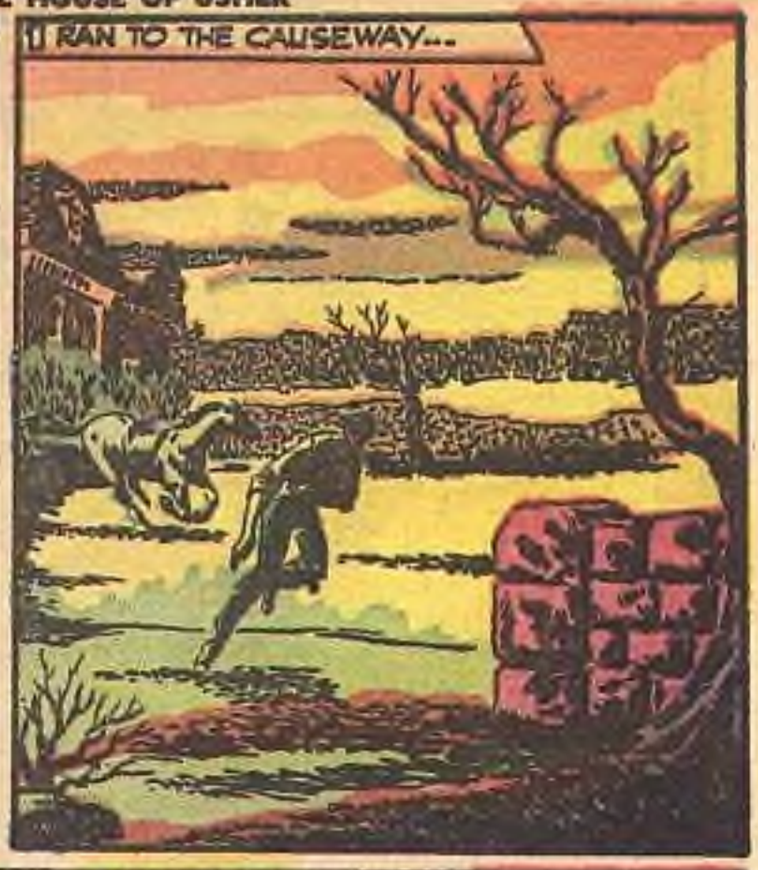
IT IS A RACE OF TIME...
Quickly, friend rodents, quickly!

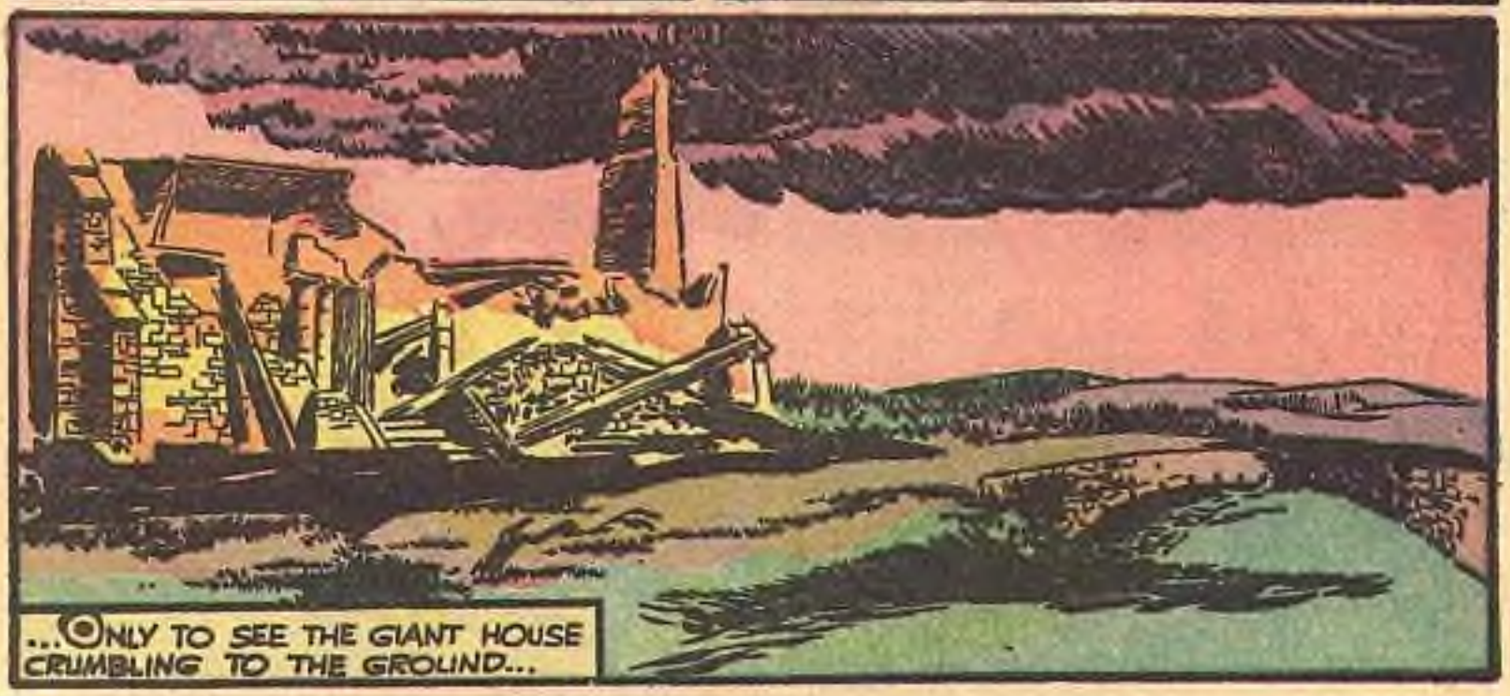
HANS PEALL

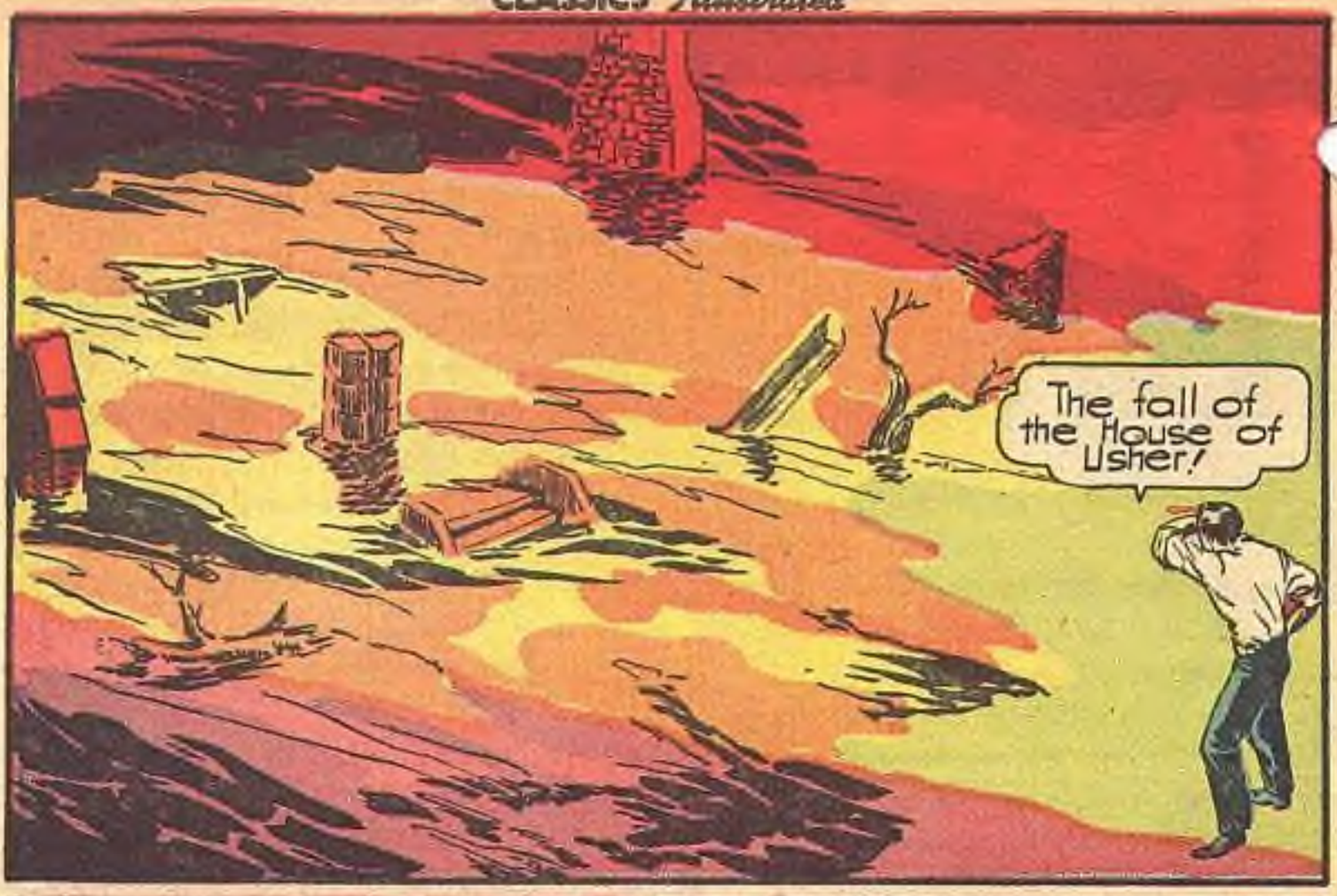
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

By Edgar Allan Poe

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER






The fall of the House of Usher!

He loved his sister and had done no wrong, willfully, yet she killed him through fear.

Goodbye forever, House of Usher.
The END

EDGAR ALLAN POE

NO AMERICAN writer has greater claim to genius than Edgar Allan Poe. His poetry combines the rhythm of stirring music and the sounds of beautiful and powerful words. His short stories, beautifully written, delve into the weird, the fantastic, yet always plausible realms of fiction. For Poe was a logician and mathematician. His stories are forerunners of the modern detective story.

Poe was born in Boston in 1809. He was orphaned at the age of three and was adopted by a wealthy Virginia couple named Allan. He was raised in an atmosphere of pampered luxury, and later attended the University of Virginia. Although high in his studies, he became addicted to gambling and drinking, and left school to join the army.

Poe then enrolled at West Point where his riotous living followed him. He once swam across the Hudson River because his fancy struck him to do so. While at West Point, he learned that his foster father had remarried and that he was to be cut from his will without a cent. Later he was dismissed from the military academy for disgraceful conduct.

Breaking away from the Allan family, Poe endeavored to make his own living. He wrote poetry and a short story, A Manuscript Found in a Bottle, which won a prize in 1833. He then worked on the "Southern Literary Messenger" in Richmond, Virginia, until 1836, and married his cousin, Virginia Clemm in that year.

Then came years of hardship. Writing on a plane high above the level of the average reader, Poe was poorly paid for his masterpieces, as his stories were not popular with the masses.

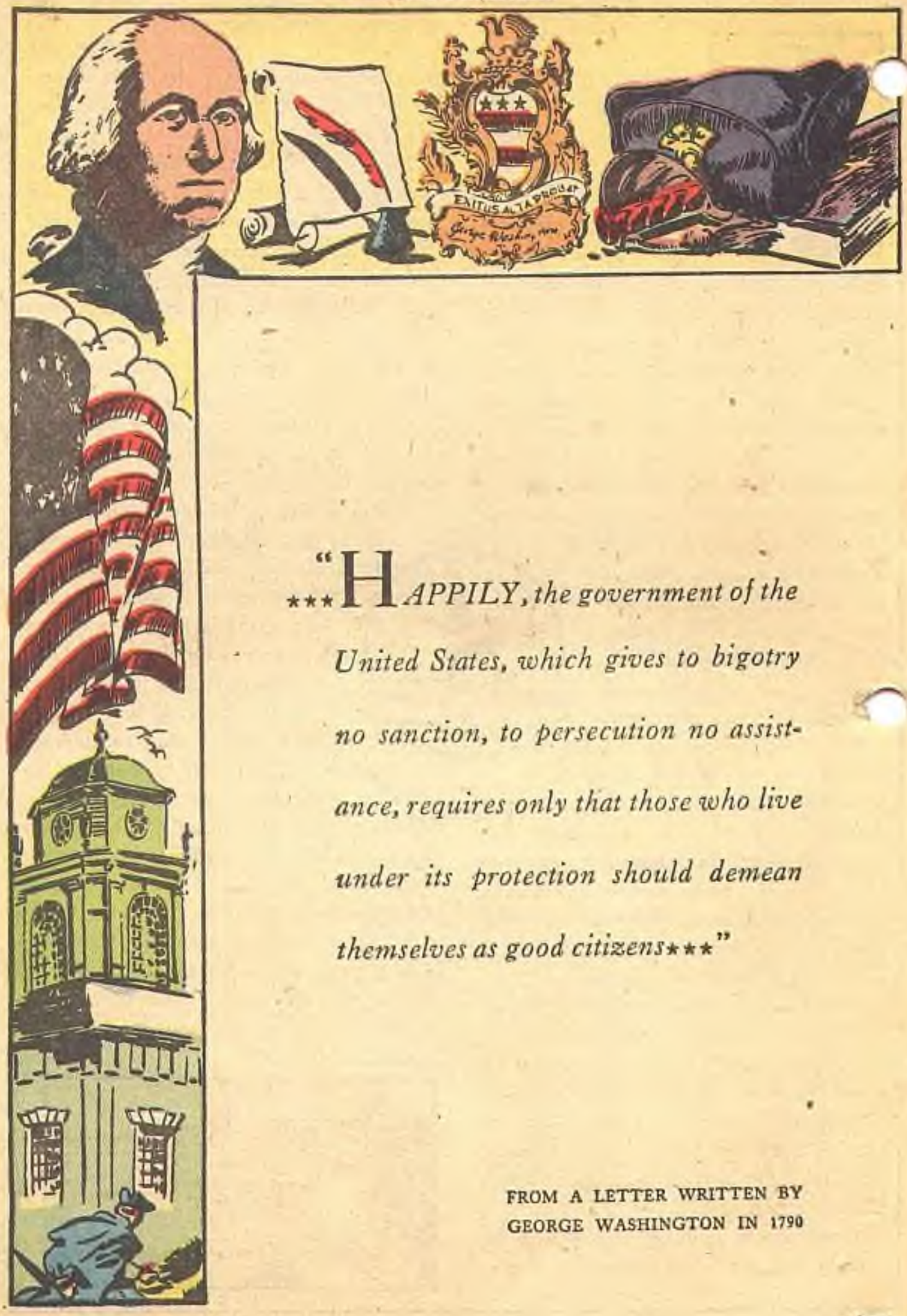
He eventually moved to Fordham, then a suburb of New York City, with his wife and her mother. His wife became an invalid, and his sorrow is expressed in his writing, for Poe loved his wife dearly.

At times, this unhappy trio lacked even the bare necessities of life and Poe or his mother-in-law would go begging from publisher to publisher, trying to sell at any price a poem or a story that eventually was to be accepted by the literary world as a masterpiece.

Poe's wife died in 1847 and he was stricken by inconsolable grief. He took heavily to drink, and won the antagonism of society for appearing arrogant and bad hearted. He died alone and without friends in Baltimore on October 7, 1849.

Poe's works reflect the unhappiness of his life and the unrest of his soul. He wrote his own history when in The Raven he spoke of "unmerciful Disaster followed fast and followed faster. . . . Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy bore. . . . . Of never, never more."

Today, almost a century after his death, Poe is given his proper valuation, and his short stories are considered among the finest in American literature and are loved by young and old alike.



"*** HAPPILY, *the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that those who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens* ***"

FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY
GEORGE WASHINGTON IN 1790